

1 November 2013

FITNESS AND CAPABILITY CONSULTATION

The fitness of employees is a matter of paramount importance to all employers – not least in the fire and rescue service. It is also vitally important that individual firefighters take responsibility for their own fitness, and take the appropriate amount of exercise. We think that a good employer would expect their employees to be diligent in maintaining fitness, while at the same time offering appropriate support to those whose fitness falls below required levels. I know that many of you have made good progress in this area, and have evidence of existing good practice.

It is with these points in mind that the Minister for Fire, Brandon Lewis MP, has asked me to conduct a consultation with a view to agreeing some core, basic principles on fitness and capability across the fire and rescue service in England. The intention is to provide a framework within which each fire and rescue authority can adopt its own particular policies; provide reassurance to individual firefighters; and be transparent with local communities regarding the treatment of fitness and capability issues in individual fire and rescue authorities.

To assist in ensuring a standardised response, I have set out the annex in the form of a questionnaire. However, please do not feel restricted by this, and provide any additional information you feel might be helpful. Please provide attachments if you feel that this would be useful.

I would be grateful if you could complete the attached questionnaire and provide any further comments you have on this to: Melanie.Gillett@communities.gsi.gov.uk by Friday 6 December. If you have any queries please contact Melanie on: 030344 41047.



PETER HOLLAND
Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser

TEXT BEING CONSULTED ON

Firefighter Fitness Standards and Assessments: Key Principles

All parties recognise the importance of physical fitness for operational firefighting personnel. All parties have a role to play in ensuring that firefighters remain fit throughout their career, in particular the firefighter themselves. However, should the firefighter conscientiously follow a programme of development and support, not have an underlying permanent medical condition, and yet still cannot maintain their fitness, then they should begin the authority initiated early retirement process. If the following principles are agreed, then this should never happen, or only happen in the rarest of circumstances.

The following key principles provide the foundation upon which a fitness assessment policy and associated processes will be based:

1. Firefighting is a physically demanding occupation and it is essential that firefighters have sufficient levels of fitness to enable them to carry out their tasks as safely and effectively as possible. As such, this requires higher levels of fitness than most other occupations and therefore the NJC role maps set out a specific requirement for operational personnel to maintain levels of personal fitness.
2. Fitness standards must reflect the occupational demands of firefighting and the Department commits to working with all parties with equal representation through a Joint Working Party, to determine safe standards.
3. A process of fitness assessment and development is required in each fire authority to ensure that operational personnel maintain a minimum standard of personal fitness in order to safely perform operational duties.
4. Fitness levels may decline with age and whilst this may be mitigated by fitness training, diet and other lifestyle changes it is acknowledged that there may be a general decline in fitness as a result of the ageing process. All operational personnel will be provided with support to maintain their levels of fitness for the duration of their career.
5. There will be periodic reviews with an independent chair to ensure that appropriate fitness standards, training, testing, monitoring and management policies and procedures are in place in each fire and rescue authority and working effectively to deliver the principles contained within this document. The first review will commence three years after the adoption of these principles.
6. Fire and Rescue Authorities, as good employers, should not put operational personnel in a situation where they face “no job, no pension” and no individual will automatically face dismissal if they do not achieve the minimum standard required. It is recognised that firefighters from the age of 55 can retire and claim a pension.
7. Where operational personnel do not achieve the minimum agreed fitness standard consideration will be given to whether an individual is able to continue on full operational duties or should be stood down, taking into account the advice provided

by the authority's occupational health provider. In making this decision the safety and well-being of the individual will be the key issue.

8. Fire and rescue authorities commit to providing a minimum of 6 months of development and support to enable individuals who do not achieve the minimum agreed standard to regain the necessary levels of fitness.
9. Where underlying medical reasons are identified that restrict/prevent someone from achieving the necessary fitness then a referral will be made to occupational health and the individual will again receive the necessary support to facilitate a return to operational duties.
10. Where the medical condition does not allow a return to operational duties, Fire and Rescue Authorities will fully explore opportunities for reasonable adjustments or redeployment within role. In those circumstances where there are no opportunities for reasonable adjustments or redeployment within role then the fire authority will commence an assessment for ill-health retirement through the IQMP process.
11. If no underlying medical issues are identified and following a programme of development and support it becomes apparent that an individual will be permanently unable to regain the necessary levels of fitness, then a fire authority will fully explore opportunities for reasonable adjustments and/or redeployment within role. In those circumstances where there are no opportunities for reasonable adjustments or redeployment within role, a fire authority will commence the authority initiated early retirement process.